

**LORE OF SUPPRESSION AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN THE WORKS  
OF MAHASWETA DEVI *MOTHER OF 1084* AND *DRAUPADI***

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**Abstract**

*The present paper aims to analyze gender discrimination as a stigma on the society, and how 'women' become stigmatized in the society due to the inequality prevalent due to this discrimination. No society can claim to be free from gender inequality which has been represented in this paper by analyzing the works of Mahasweta Devi Mother of 1084 and Draupadi. Violence acts as a tool for widening this verge and for keeping women silent inside the four walls of house. On one hand, 'women' are equated to Mother Goddess and Earth, but on the other hand, they are victimized by domestic, physical, sexual, and psychological violence in every part of the society. This paper also examines how women's behavior changes due to such kind of violence, and how they act in order to dismantle the preconceived structure of this torment.*

**Keywords:** Stigmatized, violence, domestic, physical, sexual, psychological

**Introduction**

Gender inequality is a global issue which exists in every part of the society whether it is workplace, family, academics, or social and cultural notions of the society. Women have to face inequality because society has labeled them as 'female' from the day of their birth. Cultural notions contribute to form this view of inequality, in the society, which promotes it from one generation to another. Society considers women less worthy than men, and this consideration proved to be 'curse of being female' because society runs on the cultural beliefs existing within the society. Cultural beliefs enforce silence and obedience on women. It is believed that a girl must be raised in a manner in which she must not demand but obey. Religions reinforced that woman who obey and worship by kneeling before their husbands are 'ideal woman'. Women have to prove their womanhood and fertility by giving birth to

children, without which, they are abused in the community. Women have to face sexual violence and everyone tries to wrap the matter under the carpet. They are even considered responsible for the atrocity against them. Marriage is a compulsion for them because it is considered to be a 'safe haven' where people are supposedly faithful to each other. Society starts to form expectations from women once the cultural stereotype is secured.

Society has a totally different face for 'female' which is immutable, and they are denied to compete with 'male' as they are considered to be lacking in physical strength. This lack of physical power made them think of their weakness. They do not dare to be innovative, inventive, tough, competitive, and rebellious. They quietly accept a place that the society has decided for her, influenced by the cultural norms. This is the social stigma that being a woman is a curse. Society has branded them as 'woman'. In the words of Simone de Beauvoir:

Males have always and everywhere paraded their satisfaction of feeling they are kings of creation. "Blessed be the Lord our God, and the Lord of all worlds that has not made me a woman," Jews say in their morning prayers; meanwhile, their wives resignedly murmur: "Blessed be the Lord for creating me according to his will." Among the blessings Plato thanked the gods for was, first, being born free and not a slave and, second, a man and not a woman. (Beauvoir<sup>31</sup>)

Women's behavior is affected due to this stigma, and they start to act in accordance to the expectations of the society. They start losing their self-esteem in society and accept the discrimination. Studies have shown that "by 10 years of age, most children are aware of cultural stereotypes of different groups in society, and children who are members of stigmatized groups are aware of cultural types at an even younger age" (Wikipedia). Due to their feminine psych, menstruation and pregnancy they are considered incapable to compete with men. Family treats differently the female and the male child. Education also contributes in strengthening this psyche. This stigma affects the behavior of women so much that they start accepting their place and behave in the same manner which is expected from them by the society.

The anguish of being women suppresses the desire for attaining an identity in the society. The upbringing is also responsible for the pathetic condition of women. Parents nurture a male and female child with different set of goals. A mother, who learns from cultural notions, teaches her daughter to stop competing with boys, trying to put her in accordance to the image they themselves have in the society, as they consider this aspect of society as correct. A daughter notices her mother's place in the family, her household responsibilities as well as her plights, and when she experiences the same obligations expected by the society, she starts molding herself in the same frame. She does not learn all this immediately; but it is the result of that inferiority complex which was developed during

her upbringing from her childhood. She becomes the mirror image of the women of the previous generation.

In most parts of the world, women are looked down upon as of lesser worth than that of man, because of this one third of all girls are married before they turn eighteen and sixty-five million girls are out of school. When a girl turns twelve and is in the state of utter poverty, her future is out of her control (Maria 2013). She faces the reality of being married by the age of fourteen, get pregnant by fifteen and she is forced to bear the burden of childbirth:

The destiny that society traditionally offers women is marriage. Eventoday, most women are, were, or plan to be married, or they suffer from not being so. Marriage is the reference by which the singlewoman is defined, whether she is frustrated by, disgusted at, or even indifferent to this institution. Thus, we must continue this study by analyzing marriage. (Beauvoir 502)

Women have to face domestic violence, marginalization and deprivation from education and economic support, sexual and psychological harassment in the society where they have they have their dreams to make their identity free from all the clutches, to attain liberty, and to live independently, but at the end they remain only the victims of such superimposed structures of the society. Violence inside the family by the spouse or other family members, within the community and outside home, results in physical and psychological harm to women. Violence against women is one of the central social devices by means of which 'women' are enforced into a subsidiary position by the society. Violence against 'women' is widespread which kills, torments, and damages to women physically, mentally, emotionally, sexually, and economically. According to World Health Organization (1996), studies estimate that between twenty to fifty percent of women have experienced physical violence at the hands of an intimate partner or family member (United Nations Children's Fund Innocenti Research Centre 2000).

Kamla Bhasin expressed her views by saying that the society turns the distinction between the creations of nature into discrimination. The biggest hierarchy is between the woman and the man. In India, fifty thousand girls are killed every year either just after the birth or later before attaining the age of puberty. All over the world, hundred million women have had to suffer from violence. There is no greater war than the war that is running against women in our society. One incidence of rape happens in India in every twenty-two minutes. Our constitution talks about equality of women but it remains in the constitution with no avail.

Society denies to accept women as equal to men and to give rights to enjoy essential freedom. In the case of domestic violence, women choose to suffer silently. They tolerate all the assaults just to save her relations and family. They choose their family over their self-respect and keep suffering from inside without complaining, because being "oppressed

and submerged, she becomes a stranger to herself because she is a stranger to the rest of the world" (Beauvoir 397).

It is the curse imposed on women by the society in the name of social rituals, culture and tradition due to which women have to suffer throughout their lives. It is the stigma of the society that the women who contribute for the welfare of the society as well as of their families; being half of the population of the society, but they use to be marginalized, deprived, burdened, exploited, suppressed, suffered, and harassed in the same society. There is no society which is free of such violence on women; violence is that weapon through which women are forced to keep silent for unfair behavior towards them. The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993) defines violence against women as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life" (UNCFIRC 2000).

The cases of sexual violence are on a rise all over the world. Rape of women is often used as a weapon of war. Sexual assault can also greatly affect the welfare of sufferers; women may be stigmatized and run out of favor by their families and others in the relationships. Its impact on women's mental health can be as serious as is on the physical health. Catherine MacKinnon defined sexual harassment as "the unwanted imposition of sexual requirement in the context of a relationship of unequal power" (1-2). Sexual harassment remains a common bane for the society.

Research on domestic violence has been mentioned by Innocenti Digest (2000) which interprets the tortures in categories of 'physical abuse' such as slapping, beating, arm twisting, stabbing, strangling, burning, choking, kicking, threatening with an object or weapon, and murder. 'Sexual abuse' such as coerced sex through threats, intimidation or physical force, forcing unwanted sexual acts or forcing one to have non-consensual sex. 'Psychological abuse' which includes behaviour that is intended to intimidate and to persecute, and takes the form of threats of abandonment or abuse, confinement in the four walls of house, surveillance, threats of taking away custody of the children, destruction of objects, isolation, verbal aggression and constant humiliation. 'Economic abuse' includes acts such as the denial of funds, refusal to contribute financially, denial of food and basic needs, and controlling access to health care, employment, etc. (UNCFIRC 2000).

### **Description of the Works by Mahasweta Devi**

It has been clear that Mahasweta Devi's works demonstrate established gender issues along with sexual exploitation and violence on 'women' in the society. In her works, 'women' are embodied as suppressed and double-oppressed due to being subaltern and being a 'woman', and they have the same trauma and scars throughout their lives due to the

inequality. This paper represents 'women' as the victims of domestic, psychological, and sexual violence, and how they resist against such violence; challenging the deep-rooted social structure of violence against women.

*Mother of 1084* is a novel by Mahasweta Devi which represents the devalued existence of a mother as well as marginalized and deprived condition of women. *Draupadi* is a short story by Mahasweta Devi which has the depiction of a tribal woman's underprivileged condition. The novel and the short story have the Naxalite Movement in the background, and female characters' involvement in this movement against social inequality form the crux of these works. The stories of both the works show how 'women' are suffering and facing violence at the hands of those people, who are part of the society, for whom they are participating in the deadly movement having aim of social equality. In return these characters are exploited and their image is tarnished by the society. Violence towards 'women' is taking place in both the works and the works represent the women's rebellious attitude in order to demolish the predestined and socially accepted forms of exploitation.

In the novel, *Mother of 1084*, Sujata, the main protagonist of the novel, for whom the behavior of the family members made her think of her marginalized status. Although Sujata was educated as well as good in English communication, and came from an aristocratic family, but this was only for the sake of her marriage. Her father provided her education not for her bright future but having aim of her marriage with a genuine bridegroom. Sujata's father believed that Dibyanath would rise in his life; though he did not belong to a rich family, but the same trust he never showed for his daughter. He never realized Sujata's potential and her knowledge as 'she is good in accounts'. Her knowledge and potential were ignored also by her in laws as "nobody had cared to understand why Sujata wanted to work, why she had made all the enquiries herself and found a job for herself" (Bandyopadhyay 9).

Dibyanath always made her realize of her deprived place in the house. He called her only for the fulfilment of his needs otherwise he behaved with her as she belonged to the 'other camp' and brought allegations to make his son against him. "Dibyanath had asked Sujata to give up her job. But Sujata had insisted on carrying on. Her mother-in-law was alive till Brati turned eight. As long as she had been alive, Sujata had never had the right to buy a sari of her choice" (24). "Refusing to leave her job was Sujata's second act of rebellion. Her first act of rebellion was when Brati was two. She had refused to be a mother for a fifth time" (46). She has not given the common rights of mother, which her mother-in-law had. "Dibyanath never knew that one could honour one's mother without humiliating one's wife. His wife under his feet, his mother held aloft. That was his ethos" (45). There is nobody in the family who is emotionally attached to Sujata; everyone ignored her feelings. Dibyanath expected love and respect from her but himself had the view that "a husband was not required to do anything to win his wife's respect, love and loyalty..." (45). After realizing her 'shadowy existence' in the house, her behavior changed by the passage of time having seen this kind of marginalization, and "she had been taught by life to take things as they came. She

had never thought of asking questions. She never knew that she had the right to ask questions” (31). She consoled herself with the view that nobody had happiness without any interruption after having faced the reality of her husband’s affairs outside the house. The behavior of the women due to this social stigma is better explored by Simone de Beauvoir in her feminist critical work that “she does not believe in a force she has not felt in her body, she does not dare to be enterprising, to revolt, to invent; doomed to docility, to resignation, she can only accept a place that society has already made for her. She accepts the order of things as a given” (398). Even after her son’s death in an encounter her daughter Tuli spoke harshly to her:

Enough is enough, Ma. You’ve turned this house into a tomb, Ma. Father doesn’t dare say a word when you’re about. Brother has a guilty look all the time... Everybody tries to hush up an incident like the one we had. That’s natural. Brati is dead. You must think of the living. (Bandyopadhyay 29)

It was Brati with whom she spent long hours, who respected her mother’s feeling. He had become for her ‘the only legitimate excuse for going on living’ (31). Brati unconsciously knew the deprived condition of her mother because he was concerned with the marginalized class of the society exploited by the upper class as he was involved in the Naxalite Movement, having aim for social equality, so he was capable to relay the condition of his mother with the underprivileged category. Similarly, he was concerned with her mother’s suffering as he told her ‘if you suffer, that’s suffering’ (44) and asked her ‘why are you so passive, Ma?’ (44). Sujata replied that “what else can I do? I was trained to be passive about my children. Your father, grandmother...” (44).

Her mother in law had had her other children entirely under her command. But Sujata had held on to Brati. Sujata had given Brati all her care and all her love. He was stubborn, sensitive and imaginative. Sujata had had to strain a lot to protect Brati from the dominance of her husband and her mother in law. (32)

Sujata had learned from her son’s rebellious attitude and his actions for attaining his dream of changing the class issues existed in the society. After meeting Nandini and Somu’s mother, Sujata’s attitude had been changed from passive and suppressed into rebellious and revolutionary like her son, and a transformed Sujata came forward as she started this movement inside her image. Another female character is Somu’s sister who was deprived from that right which her brother had as Simone de Beauvoir stated in *The Second Sex* “One of the most common is that the adolescent girl does not receive the same encouragement accorded to her brothers; on the contrary, she is expected to be a *woman as well*, and she must add to her professional work the duties that femininity implies” (400). After the death of her brother and father; without any upright education, she had to face the difficulties to run the household which damaged her psyche:

The fire of domestic responsibility had burned up Somu’s sister. She bore a severe anger in her looks. Somu’s dying had left her dead. He had been the

only son in the family. Because he had to go to a good college, their father had not provided money for his sister's education. She paid for her own education by tutoring children. (Bandyopadhyay 32)

Nandini, a comrade of Naxalite Movement, was a victim of physical and psychological violence. She was involved in Brati's group, and had the same potential to rebel against social inequality as other male comrades had. When Brati and other comrades were killed in an encounter, she was caught by the police and sent to the jail, where she was investigated with humiliating remarks like 'Oh, you're Chatterjee's friend?' (73) and 'because "the mind and the senses grew hypersensitive in that living with oneself, keen and sharp and cutting like the knife of the surgeon in the morgue or the blade of a bayonet"' (73). All the tortures she faced, put the permanent scares on her psyche so badly that she was unable to lead a normal life again, but she wanted to endure her rebel secretly, being doubtful that she would be killed somewhere. She told Sujata that "my optical nerves were damaged from the exposure to the glare of the lamp for forty- eight, seventy- two hours at stretch. My right eye is totally blind. One can't tell by looking at me, though" (86).

Similarly, Dopdi was also a Naxalite comrade in the short story *Draupadi*, and the victim of brutal harassment at the hands of interrogators, who raped her the whole night. She was a tribal woman, leading her life with her husband DulnaManjhi, and they are the 'main culprits' involved in the murder of SurjaSahu and his son, who exploited the villagers by taking 'canal tax' on providing them water because sharecroppers demanded half 'paddy' of the total cultivation and 'the untouchables don't get water' (Spivak26). So, tribes planned to kill him. "Dopdi had said, His mouth watered when he looked at me. I'll put out his eyes" (27).

"Dopdi and Dulna belong to the category of such fighters, for they too kill by means of hatchet and scythe, bow and arrow, etc. In fact, their fighting power is greater than the gentlemen's" (19). But after the encounter of her husband in the forest of Jharkhani, whom she could not see in the last moment of his life, she became more determined to save other comrades by putting her life on risk as she confronts that "what will they do if they catch me? they will counter me. Let them" (25). "Thus, the search for Dopdi continues. In the forest belt of Jharkhani, the Operation continues- will continue" (21). Senanayak, who was 'Bengali specialist' ordered to the soldiers to 'catch DopdiMejhen. She will lead us to the others' (24). She was illiterate but ingenious comrade to understand the strategies of the army, she never responded whenever she heard the calling of her name because she knew:

Dopdi knows, has learned by hearing so often and so long, how one can come to terms with torture. If mind and body give way under torture, Dopdi will bite off her tongue. That boy did it. They kounterredhim. When they kounter you, your hands are tied behind you. All your bones are crushed, your sex is a terrible wound. (25)

Dopdi was important for the police. They were curious to catch her because she was a 'trustworthy courier', and both culprits were wanted by the government. Dulna was killed, and unfortunately 'Draupadi Mehen was apprehended at 6.53 p.m.' (31). Other comrades escaped, and she was taken to the camp. "Questioning took another hour exactly. No one touched her, and she was allowed to sit on a canvas camp stool. At 8.57 Senanayak's dinner hour approached, and saying, make her. *Do the needful*, he disappeared" (31). In the operation Jharkhani, during the first phase of chasing the 'fugitives', comrades were caught and shot immediately. There was nothing to do with their bodies, and were left for the food of wild animals, but in the next phase, a female comrade was left to catch, and she was not shot immediately as she was a sexual being for them. In the camp her arms and legs were tied to the poles, and she was brutally raped by the interrogators:

Slowly the bloodied nail heads shift from her brain. Trying to move, she feels her arms and legs still tied to four posts. Something sticky under her ass and waist. Her own blood. Only the gag has been removed. Incredible thirst. In case she says 'water' she catches her lower lip in her teeth. She senses that her vagina is bleeding. How many came to make her? (31)

To be a woman caused as a curse on her because she was punished for the involvement in the movement as well as for being a 'woman'. For the interrogators she was only the sexual object in order to satisfy their lust till her last breath, and left 'for the foxes to devour.' She was prepared for her encounter but after this brutal act of 'shaming her, a tear trickles out of the corner of her eye' (31), and she understood that "she's made up right. Her breasts are bitten raw, the nipples torn. How many? Four- five- six- seven- then Draupadi had passed out" (31). When Dopdi opened her eyes and moved she didn't need to wait long for the therapy course which started again in the midnight darkness. The rapists were like "a compelled spread-eagled still body. Active pistons of flesh rise and fall, rise and fall over it" (32).

Draupadi was a revolutionary woman like Nandini in *Mother of 1084*, who continued her rebellion secretly. For Draupadi, it didn't matter to be rape victim but she stood back like a fighter when she came to know that she would be taken to the 'Burra Sahib's tent'. She herself tore her piece of cloth with her teeth, and came forward naked towards Senanayak "in the bright sunlight with her head high. The nervous guards trail behind" (32). Seeing Draupadi without clothes shaking with the determined laughter, Senanayak was surprised to see a 'woman' who transformed into an unpredictable personality as well as challenging his manhood:

Her ravaged lips bleed as she begins laughing. Draupadi wipes the blood on her palm and says in a voice that is as terrifying, sky splitting and sharp as her ululation, What's the use of clothes? You can strip me; how can you clothe me again? Are you a man? (33)

Finally, she spitted a ‘bloody gob’ on ‘Senanayak’s white bush shirt’, and said that “there isn’t a man here that I should be ashamed. I will not let you put my cloth on me. what more can you do? Come on, *kounter* me- come on, *kounter* me-?... Draupadi pushes Senanayak with her two mangled breasts, and for the first time Senanayak is afraid to stand before an unarmed *target*, terribly afraid” (33).

It has been shown that although to be a woman is proved to be a curse, but it is ‘women’like Draupadi and Nandini, who are capable to change this ‘curse’ into their ‘fight against violence’ and they are embodied as a fighter to challenge the fixed picture of the society in which violence on women is accepted as the absolute truth as it is mentioned in *The Second Sex*, “The representation of the world as the world itself is the work of men; they describe it from a point of view that is their own and that they confound with the absolute truth” (Beauvoir 196).

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